

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9479

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

C O N F I D E N T I A L DAMASCUS 6028

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SY, LE

SUBJECT: VISIT OF CAMILLE CHAMOUN TO DAMASCUS

1. LEBANESE NLP LEADER, CAMILLE CHAMOUN, MADE ONE-DAY VISIT TO DAMASCUS SEPT 8 ACCOMPANIED BY DELEGATION WHICH INCLUDED DANY CHAMOUN, MARON HELOU, AND COL NAKHLE MUGHABGHEB. SEPT 9 AL-THAWRAH HEADLINED: "MEETINGS CONTINUE IN DAMASCUS TO FIND SOLUTION TO LEBANESE CRISIS. PRESIDENT ASAD RECEIVES CHAMOUN AND ACCOMPANYING DELEGATION, STRESSING NEED FOR CONTINUED EFFORTS TO RESOLVE CRISIS AND SAFEGUARD LEBANON'S INTEGRITY. CHAMOUN PRAISES PRES. ASAD'S EFFORTS FOR SAKE OF LEBANON."

2. AFTER INITIAL MEETING WITH FONMIN KHADDAM AND
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MINSTATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS, ADI, CHAMOUN MET FOR

OVER TWO HOURS WITH PRESIDENT ASAD. ACCORDING TO PRESS, DISCUSSION CENTERED ON CURRENT LEBANESE SITUATION IN LIGHT OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS AND EFFORTS BEING EXERTED TO SOLVE CRISIS. NEED FOR CONTINUING THESE EFFORTS WAS STRESSED SO THAT OBJECTIVE OF RESTORING NORMAL LIFE TO LEBANON COULD BE ACHIEVED.

3. IN AIRPORT DEPARTURE STATEMENT, CHAMOUN EXPRESSED HIS SATISFACTION WITH VISIT. HE SAID HE WAS CONVINCED THAT COMING DAYS AND WEEKS WOULD SEE STRENGTHENING OF RELATIONS AND COOPERATION IN ALL SPHERES BETWEEN LEBANON AND SYRIA. "WE DID NOT TALK ABOUT ANY NEW PLAN," HE SAID, "BUT WE DID TALK ABOUT THE SPIRIT OF COOPERATION WHICH SHOULD CHARACTERIZE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. THE SYRIAN ARMED FORCES WILL STAY IN LEBANON SO LONG AS THEY HAVE CONSENT OF LEGITIMATE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES. I AM CERTAIN THESE FORCES WILL RETURN TO THEIR COUNTRY AT FIRST REQUEST OF LEGITIMATE LEBANESE AUTHORITIES." CHAMOUN CALLED FOR COOPERATION BY BOTH COUNTRIES IN ORDER TO SAFEGUARD INDIVIDUALS AS WELL AS SYRIAN AND LEBANESE SOCIETIES. HE EXPRESSED DETERMINATION TO RESTORE LEBANON'S TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY AND CONCLUDED BY EXPRESSING HIS OPTIMISM AS RESULT OF HIS DAMASCUS VISIT.

4. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH NO DETAILS OF CONVERSATIONS HAVE YET EMERGED, WE, AND THE FEW SYRIANS WE HAVE TALKED TO, SENSE NEW DEGREE OF OPTIMISM LOCALLY AS RESULT OF CHAMOUN VISIT. FACT THAT HE CAME AT ALL IS CONSIDERED SUCCESS FOR SYRIA AND FOR ITS CURRENT EFFORTS TO INSURE SUCCESSFUL INSTALLATION OF PRESIDENT-ELECT SARKIS ON SEPT 23 -- "TO REESTABLISH CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK IN LEBANON," AS ONE PRESIDENCY OFFICIAL RECENTLY TOLD TIME CORRESPONDENT.

5. SYRIAN INITIATIVE, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, HAS BEEN DIRECTED TOWARD HAVING TWO-THIRDS OF LEBANESE DEPUTIES ASSEMBLE IN CHTAURA SEPT 23 FOR INVESTITURE. SYRIANS NOT INSISTING ON CHTAURA BUT BELIEVE IT WOULD BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO MORE DEPUTIES THAN BEIRUT OR ANOTHER SITE. VISITS BY LEBANESE LEADERS AND FACTIONS TO DAMASCUS AT SYRIAN INVITATION
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HAVE BEEN DIRECTED TOWARD THIS GOAL. SO FAR, FROM ALL THAT HAS BEEN REVEALED PUBLICLY, INITIATIVE HAS PROCEEDED SMOOTHLY. CHAMOUN VISIT WAS OF MAJOR IMPORTANCE TO THIS SCENARIO SINCE ASAD WISHED TO ASSURE THAT CHAMOUN AND FRANGIEH DO NOT SPOIL THE PARTY SEPT 23. OUR FEELING, FROM CHAMOUN'S STATEMENTS AND SYRIAN PRESS PLAY, IS THAT GENERAL UNDERSTANDING WAS REACHED ON THIS POINT. QUESTION, OF COURSE, IS WHAT CHAMOUN MAY HAVE ASKED FOR OR OBTAINED IN RETURN.

6. AS SEEN FROM DAMASCUS, IMMEDIATE GOAL OF CURRENT SYRIAN INITIATIVE IS SUCCESSFUL INSTALLATION OF SARKIS. LONGER RANGE SECURITY SITUATION HAS UNDOUBTEDLY BEEN DISCUSSED, BUT AT THE MOMENT THIS POINT IS SECONDARY. SO IS FUTURE OF SYRIAN-PALESTINIAN RELATIONS SO LONG AS PALESTINIANS DO NOT DISRUPT INVESTITURE. AFTER SARKIS TAKES OFFICE, AS MININFO ISKANDAR AHMED TOLD A REPORTER SEPT 8, EFFORTS WILL BE DIRECTED TOWARD ESTABLISHING ARAB SOLIDARITY IN PREPARATION FOR SUMMIT. HIS IMPLICIT ASSUMPTION IS THAT EFFORTS TO LESSEN INTER-ARAB TENSIONS AND DIFFERENCES AFTER SPET 23 WILL ALSO HELP SARKIS CONSOLIDATE HIS GOVERNMENT IN LEBANON.
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